

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

GOD IS AT WORK IN YOU

Read Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

Just what does it mean to "continue to work out your own salvation in fear and trembling"? Are we back to salvation by works? What's going on here? The passage has generated lots of controversy, but what does it mean? How should this command affect our living?

Salvation as Reconciliation and Sanctification

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." (v12)

Paul is affirming to the Christians in Philippi that obedience should not be an eyeservice matter but genuine and heartfelt. We should also not miss the connection between the obedience Jesus showed (Philippians 2:8) and the obedience Paul expected of Christians as followers of Jesus (Philippians 2:12).

Work out your own salvation:

We know that Paul did not mean "work so as to earn your own salvation." Such a statement would contradict the whole of Paul's gospel. What Paul did mean is to call the Philippians to put forth real effort into their Christian lives. This is not to work their salvation in the sense of accomplishing it, but to work out their salvation – to see it evident in every area of their lives, to activate this salvation God freely gave them. There is a sense in which our salvation is complete, in the sense that Jesus has done a complete work for us. Still there is also a sense in which our salvation is incomplete, in that it is not yet a complete work in us.

This is about "our own salvation". In a sense, your "personal salvation". This tells us to give attention to our own salvation. Sometimes we show great concern for the work of God in others, and not enough for His work in us. We should care about the souls of others, but this care must begin with our own soul.

Fear and Trembling:

We work out our salvation with fear and trembling; but it doesn't have to be the fear of hell or damnation. It may instead be the righteous and awe-filled reverence of God every believer should have. It doesn't have to be the trembling of a guilty sinner; it should instead be the joyful trembling of an encounter with the glory of God. Paul's idea was not that we should live our Christian lives with a constant sense of fear and terror, but that we should live with a fear of failing to work out your own salvation.

For God Is at Work in You

"... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (v13)

Paul here gave the reason why Christians must work out their salvation with fear and trembling – because God is working in them. The idea is that since God has done and is doing a work in the Christian, the Christian therefore has a greater responsibility to work diligently with fear and trembling regarding his own salvation and walk with the Lord. God's work in us increases our responsibility; it doesn't lessen it in any way.

Those that take God's sovereignty and working and use them as an excuse for inaction and lethargy are like the wicked and lazy servant of Matthew 25:24-30. Those that are really God's servants use their

understanding of His sovereignty and omnipotence as a motivation for greater, more dedicated service to Him.

Both to will and to do

God's work in us extends to the transformation of our will, as well as changing our actions (to do). Yet in light of the original exhortation to work out your own salvation, this is not a passive transaction. We must actively engage with the Lord in working this out.

The motive behind God's work in our life is for His good pleasure. He does so because it gives Him pleasure to do it.

Stop Complaining and Arguing

“Do all things without complaining and disputing...” (v14)

“Live a cheerful life, without complaining or division among yourselves.” (v14 TPT)

There is a good deal of dispute among commentators as to if this complaining and disputing refers to problems among the Philippians (such as mentioned in Philippians 2:1-4) or if this refers to their attitude towards God. Perhaps they resented God because of their present conflict (Philippians 1:27-30).

Because Paul specifically used terms that were used to describe Israel's complaining towards God during the Exodus (The Israelites in the wilderness grumbled against Moses (Exodus 16:7-8; Numbers 14:27), but their real quarrel was with the Lord himself. They hadn't learned to trust God.), it is probably best to see the complaining and disputing as including their attitude towards God.

In this command, the emphasis falls on the words **“all things”**, which is actually the first word of the verse in the ancient Greek text. We can therefore say: “dispute not with God; let Him do what seems good to Him; dispute not with your fellow Christians, raise not railing accusations against them; and dispute not with the world for you know who is influencing them”

Becoming Blameless and Pure in a Crooked Generation

“... that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...” (v15)

Through the display of a non-complaining spirit, we show ourselves to be true followers of God. Harmless can have the thought of “pure” or “unalloyed.” But the translation as harmless is also justified (it is the same word used in Matthew 10:16).

In using the term “crooked and perverse generation”, Paul seems to refer back to Deuteronomy 32:5: *“They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation.”* Paul meant that modern Christians should not be like rebellious Israel, who were constantly complaining and disputing with God during the wilderness sojourn.

Shine as lights in the world

This is not an encouragement to do something; it is a simple statement of fact. Christians are lights in the world; the only question is, “How brightly do they shine?”

We are to fulfill our place as lights in the world:

- Lights are used to make things evident.
- Lights are used to guide.

- Lights are used as a warning.
- Lights are used to bring cheer.
- Lights are used to make things safe.

Paul knew that the lights were in a bad place. Instead of excusing the lights for not shining, Paul knew that their position made it all the more important that they shine. Being in a dark place is a greater incentive to shine.

Holding Forth the Word of Life

“...holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.” (v16)

The phrase holding fast could also be translated holding forth. Both meanings are true, and Paul could have meant it in this dual sense. We hold fast – in the sense of holding strong – the word of life, and we also hold forth the word of life. The idea that Paul’s work might somehow end up being in vain was a troublesome thought to him. He knew that his work really abided in people, so that if those people did not continue on strong with the Lord, there was a sense in which his own ministry was in vain.

Jesus already has taught us that our fruit must abide and remain:

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16)

Poured Out Like a Drink Offering

“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.” (vv17-18)

Paul here alluded to a practice among both Jews and pagans in their sacrifices. They often poured out wine (or sometimes perfume) either beside (as in the Jewish practice) or upon (as in the pagan practice) an animal that was sacrificed to God or pagan gods. This is the drink offering, which accompanied another sacrifice, that is mentioned in Numbers 15:4-5 and 28:7. The grammar of **“I am being poured out”** is in the present tense. With this Paul indicated the possibility that his execution may be immanent.

On the sacrifice and service of your faith

The ancient Greek word translated service is leutrogia. It meant, “Service to God or His cause... any priestly action or sacred performance.” Therefore, in this verse we have a sacrifice, a priest, and an accompanying libation that makes the sacrifice even more precious. Since the sacrifice and service were connected with the faith of the Philippians, it is best to see Paul’s picture describing them as the “priests” and their faith as the “sacrifice,” to which Paul added (and thereby enriched) his martyrdom as a drink offering.

I am glad and rejoice... you also be glad and rejoice with me:

Paul looked forward to what might be his imminent martyrdom and expected the Philippians to be glad and rejoice with him. Paul wasn’t being morbid here, asking the Philippians to take joy in something as depressing as his death. Yet he did ask the Philippians to see his death as something that would bring glory to God. This is a theme repeated from Philippians 1:20.

Paul’s life was going to be a sacrifice for Jesus Christ, either in life or in death. This was a source of gladness and joy for Paul, and he wants the Philippians to adopt the same attitude.

Again, we come to the consistent theme of Philippians: joy. But this is joy based not on circumstances (quite the opposite, really), but based in the fact of a life totally committed to Jesus Christ.